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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: QATAR TRIES TO MITIGATE H1N1 PUBLIC CONCERN

(U) KEY POINTS

-- Despite public concern about the potential spread of H1N1 in Qatar following a reported death in August, the Government of Qatar recently announced that the academic year 2009/2010 for all government, semi-governmental, and independent schools will start on schedule.

-- According to one public opinion poll, Qataris overwhelmingly favor a postponement, despite repeated assurances from the Government that the H1N1 outbreak is under control.

-- The Ministry of Health also announced a seasonal influenza vaccination campaign for all school-age children up to 18 years of age. Vaccination against H1N1 influenza will start once the vaccines are available, probably in late 2009 or early 2010.

(SBU) COMMENTS

-- (SBU) Post is in regular contact with officials in the Ministry of Health and will report on further developments as they occur.

End Key Points and Comments.

PUBLIC REACTION

¶1. (U) Although only one H1N1-related death has been reported in Qatar as of August 31, Qataris appear somewhat panicked by the influenza's global reach.

¶2. (U) Assistant Director of Passports and Airport Security, Colonel Ibrahim Ahmed Nasr, reported in an interview with a local Arabic-language newspaper August 27 that Qataris have changed their travel destinations this year to the Gulf and other Arab and Middle Eastern countries, avoiding destinations such as Europe and Southeast Asia, where they believe the disease is prevalent.

¶3. (U) According to local media, pharmacies in Doha have witnessed increased demand for Tamiflu - the accepted treatment for H1N1- and the purchase of a large number of medical masks.

¶4. (U) A local English-language newspaper reported August 31 that the Supreme Council of Health (SCH) and the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) will cooperate on health campaigns couched in Islamic religious principles to combat H1N1 influenza. The newspaper reported that one thousand posters have been distributed in three languages at various mosques and prayer rooms in the country, describing the symptoms of the disease and preventive steps people can take to reduce the likelihood of transmission. Some Friday sermons are also reportedly promoting H1N1 awareness.

¶5. (U) Dr. Youssri Abd Al Galeel Radwan, a member of the Emergency Preparedness Committee at the Ministry of Health, renewed his call for the return of Qatari students currently abroad, especially in

Britain and the United States, before the start of next winter to avoid contracting the virus, according to a local Arabic-language newspaper.

START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

¶6. (U) In an interview in an Arabic-language newspaper August 27 Dr. Abdel-Wahab Al Mosleh, Director of the Emergency Department at Hamad Medical City (HMC) and the Director of Hamad International Medical Training Center, said that there is no need to delay the start of the school year as there is no reason to think that the epidemic will have abated within the next few months. Instead, when cases are detected in a specific grade, all students in that class should be granted leave until the symptoms disappear, for a minimum of seven days, he noted.

¶7. (U) A September 1 opinion poll conducted by a local newspaper showed that 90 percent of Qataris prefer to postpone the start of the school year, with only 10 percent supported upholding the current school schedule.

¶8. (SBU) The spouse of the Embassy's ARSO, a teacher at a local nursery, reported September 7 that all children who want to start daycare or nursery school within seven days of entering the country must provide a doctor's note saying the child is not suspected of having H1N1. This order apparently originated with the SCH.

SCHOOL VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

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¶8. (U) Dr. Al Mosleh also announced August 27 that a seasonal influenza vaccination campaign will be carried out next month. This vaccination campaign, which will begin in the private schools, will include all students eighteen years old and younger.

¶9. (U) A similar campaign of H1N1 flu vaccinations will begin once the vaccine is available, likely in late 2009 or early 2010, according to Mosleh.

OTHER PREPARATIONS

¶10. (U) According to a local Arabic-language newspaper, the Supreme Council for Health has been in communication with Qatar's foreign schools, whose academic year has already begun. The SCH is conducting interviews with school administration and health personnel to better understand the status of the H1N1 outbreak and update their contacts database. Public health teams have also been sent to schools to make sure that they have the most up-to-date plans.

¶11. (U) The article further reports that workshops in Arabic and English for school health personnel and administrators will be announced soon by the SCH.

¶12. (U) Dr. Mohammad Al Thani, Director of Public Health, stated in the English language press on September 3 that schools had been asked to keep thermometers to check students' body temperatures daily. However, there was no plan to install thermal cameras at schools, like those operating at the airport, he said.

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